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Spiritual Progress Through Prayer

A SERIES OF EIGHT MASTERFUL LESSONS
FOR YOUR GROWTH THROUGH EFFECTIVE PRAYER



LESSON THREE

Mayan Revelation Number 305

Daily Guidance Through Prayer

IN THIS LESSON:

THE VALUE OF REGULAR
PRAYER HABITS

ESTABLISH A TIME FOR
STUDY AND MEDITATION

SEND UP FLASH PRAYERS

HOW TO USE YOUR FIRST
WAKING MOMENTS

DIRECT YOUR LAST
WAKING THOUGHTS

BELOVED PERFECTOR:

THROUGHOUT this Series dealing with your experience of Prayer you will find that it is helpful before you approach each new Lesson to review those which you have studied previously. While you are striving to maintain a time for family and private devotions, apply what you have learned about pushing aside distracting thoughts and sounds. On every occasion when you approach God, make a sincere effort to replace mistrust with confidence. As you endeavor to form and maintain better prayer habits, keep in mind the importance of perseverance.

This Lesson outlines prayer practices that bring inner strength when they are observed every day. In our modern world it requires determination to establish a time and a place where we can shut out clamoring voices and be alone with God. Yet, we need times of quietness or we will become the victims of confusion. The more pressures there are upon us, the more urgent it is that we reserve blocks of time when we can be still and repossess our souls. Without God's direction we become lost in the complexity of the demands that we face.

Approach this Lesson with prayer:



PRAYER

Dear God, awaken in me a fervent desire to have a more vital consciousness of Thy Presence. Make me eager to see when and where and how I should pray. I know that without Thee I falter and stumble. Help me to seek Thee more faithfully and to accept Thy guidance and support. In the Master's name. Amen.



THE VALUE OF REGULAR PRAYER HABITS

WORDSWORTH SAID:

"The world is too much with us; late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers."

Many of us live in small homes or crowded apartments where it is difficult to find a place to be alone. Even if you have the luxury of a room of your own you may be self-conscious about going apart to pray. Yet, you can contribute more to your family and to the groups with which you associate if, from prayer, you have gained the ability to think clearly and to face calmly the problems that are before you.

There is a universal law that whatever a man puts his confidence in

so becomes a part of his being. Napoleon and Hitler placed so much faith in their own ability to right the wrongs of the world that they became supermen in their own eyes and ruthlessly used millions of other humans as pawns. Ghandi had so much faith in the worth of each man - even an "untouchable" - that he was willing to sacrifice his life to give the most pitiable creature an opportunity for a better existence.

If a man believes that his security depends entirely upon his bank account, he is inclined to pour all of his life into his work and investments, to a large degree excluding fellowship with his family and friends, and setting aside no time for communion with God. But if he believes that eternal values are of primary importance, he will want to take time every day to check his sights and be sure he is going in the right direction, not getting bogged down in a round of activities that are meaningless, or only of secondary worth.

Prayer at its highest level is not a refuge from the issues before us, but a preparation to accept each challenge with insight and fortitude. It is not a mystical escape from the world, but an encounter with God that strengthens us for combat with the adversaries we will meet.

Through worship we find our aims clarified and ennobled. We tap power to master the tasks that are ours. We gain serenity in the midst of disappointment and sorrow.

In ancient times a Hebrew began his day with bowed head and words of praise to his Maker. In the middle of the morning he stopped for a time of worship; and throughout the day he paused at three-hour intervals, wherever he was, to say his prayers.

Men and women who live in twentieth-century America may feel that they are in an enlightened age when any intelligent person knows that empty forms are not true religion. Many people, unfortunately, are eager to throw out the habits of worship which were carefully observed by their forefathers, but they are not wise enough to see that haphazard prayer brings with it only a meager measure of satisfaction.

If we turn to God only when some special need prompts us to beg His aid we are reducing our worship to the level of paganism. The Hebrew-Christian conception of God is of One who not only provides for our needs, but who desires fellowship with His children. He is the Friend who walks at your elbow and mine. He is the Spirit Who prompts us to live nobly. He is the Comforter Who brings us solace in times of grief.

The man who prays only when he wants God to rescue him from danger, or to do him a favor, is limiting his prayer to use for selfish ends. He might be compared to the person who thinks of his friends only when they can serve him. He is as shiftless as the person who expects his country to protect him, but who does not take the trouble to vote, or to do anything to promote the welfare of his land.

Deep in every heart is the urge to pray. If we allow this impulse to remain dormant except for occasional outbursts of thanksgiving, or cries for help, we are behaving like primitive people. We are failing to take advantage of the rich religious heritage that is ours.

Study the lives of men and women of every age who were on intimate terms with God and you will find that they faithfully observed regular times of prayer. Through daily fellowship with the Father they drew so close to Him that they saw Him in the jostling crowd, they heard Him advising them as they struggled with important decisions, and they sensed His Presence when they knelt to pray. God became truly their Teacher, Judge, and Companion. This can be your experience and mine.

We should respond freely to any impulse to talk with God, either to praise Him, or to ask for His forgiveness and His guidance. But skill in the use of prayer requires training. Our knowledge will be limited and our spiritual growth will be retarded if our prayer habits vary according to our moods.

An athlete would never qualify for the Olympic Games if he ran only when he felt inclined to do so. A musician would never become professional in his art without regular practice. An astronomer could never interpret what he saw through his telescope if he had not spent years studying the laws that control the movements of the planets.

Knowledge of science comes by mastering a definite field of knowledge. The ability to speak a foreign tongue is gained by increasing one's vocabulary week after week. When we reserve definite times for spiritual study and meditation, we learn how to understand God's language and how to claim more and more of the power. He makes this Power available to those who know and obey His laws, and who walk in His ways.

Establish regular prayer habits and gradually you will feel the presence of God more clearly. When you turn to Him in prayer you will not seem to be talking into a void. You will not feel that God is far away, but you will know that God is both with you and within you!

Practice faithfully and you will become proficient in the Art of Prayer. Claim for yourself the peace and the power that comes to those who diligently seek communion with the Heavenly Father.



HOW TO USE YOUR FIRST WAKING MOMENTS

THE first moments of the day are crucial. If you dig up yesterday's worries, or become obsessed with tomorrow's load, you put a great handicap in your own path. So consider the new day that is before you as a unit itself:

- Make it a practice to direct your first waking thoughts to God. Praise Him for His marvelous creation and for His wonderful gifts to you and to all men. Take a moment to name a few of the things for which you are thankful. Rejoice that you have before you a clean page of life.

- For three or four minutes expose your mind and soul to the Heavenly Father. Remember that He cares for you personally. Feel His nearness. Know that He is beside you in the stillness and that He will go with you throughout the day.
- Recall the Truth that you are created in God's image - that a spark of the Divine is in your life. This thought will summon you to be your best self - to avoid being irritable, inclined to whine, or to be self-indulgent. You are a child of God, and as you remember your heritage you will be able to stand taller, walk with a surer step, and approach the day in a spirit of glad anticipation and calm confidence.
- In the morning, direct your first conscious thoughts to prayer and you will set a fine tone for the whole day. If you awake before the alarm goes off, leisurely stretch both your muscles and your mind while you have fellowship with God. Or stand by an open window and breathe deeply while you meditate. Or kneel by your bed and humbly give your whole day into God's care. Surrender each hour to be used as He directs.
- If for any reason you have missed praying during your first moments of consciousness, turn your attention to God while you dress, or eat breakfast, or travel on your way. This may be a more difficult time for prayer, but it can be utilized.

Many earnest seekers have testified that their days were happier and they were able to accomplish far more when they took time in the early morning to meet God in prayer. Then they did not feel that they were facing their problems alone, but knew that God was leading them when they were perplexed and sustaining them when they were weary. This experience can be yours.

When you awake, silently praise your Maker, or sing a hymn of thanksgiving, or repeat a verse such as:

"This is the day which the Lord has made.
Let us rejoice and be glad in it."

-- Psalm 118:24

Next, visualize the responsibilities that are before you. If some are unpleasant, ask for patience to fulfill them without complaints. If your burdens are heavy, accept the assistance God is offering you. If your problems are perplexing, affirm: "God has the answer." Do not expect to see all the way ahead, but go forward into the new day without fear or misgivings.

Launch out with confidence. When you have made a good beginning, you are well on the way toward your goal.

Before you conclude your early morning prayer, think of those whom you expect to meet that day: The members of your family, your co-workers, your friends. Ask God to bless each one and to help you, by word and deed, to reveal His spirit to every person whom you encounter.

ESTABLISH A TIME FOR STUDY AND MEDITATION

*I*T has been pointed out that although God is ready to listen whenever we turn to Him, there is value in setting aside regular times and places for prayer. When we spend the first moments of each day in God's presence we are saved from useless anxiety and from the tendency to waste hours doing a multitude of things which have little or no value.

It is wise to keep our daybreak prayers quite brief; but if we do honestly want to grow in an understanding of ourselves and of our relationship to our Creator, it is necessary for us to utilize a more extended period of study in which to learn of the laws that govern our spiritual life. Of course you recognize this, and that is why you joined Mayanry, and why you have undertaken this course of instruction.

The inspiration and strength you receive from prayer depends to some extent upon your eagerness and sincerity, but also upon your knowledge and understanding. This is true in every realm of life. Your pleasure in watching a ball game is increased when you understand the rules. Your appreciation of a symphony concert is doubled when you know something about the instruments used in the orchestra and the compositions to be played.

If your hobby is stamp collecting, you will listen attentively when a friend tells you of a new issue; and the more background you have in the study of stamps the more fascinated you become by each bit of information that you gain. The same principle applies to your appreciation of the art of prayer. So become a collector of magazines, tracts, and books that will enrich your store of spiritual information, and take time not only to read them but to meditate upon the ways by which any new insight can be applied to your daily life. At least once every day, take time to search for further knowledge of God and His Laws.

The study of any subject requires discipline, and it is especially difficult to turn our thoughts from considerations of the business that is before us, or the household duties that clamor for our attention, and to center them upon God and the great underlying principles that govern human life. But we need enlightenment, so we are wise if we do all in our power to make it easier to form habits that are conducive to study, meditation, and prayer.

- First, select a definite time. I know a busy executive who turns his morning coffee break into a "prayer break." I know the mother of five children who every day lets the breakfast dishes wait while she takes fifteen minutes for her private devotions. I know a government employee who gives a half hour every evening to Bible study and prayer. Choose the time that is best for you.
- Second, establish a definite place. You will find that you are more quickly able to slip into the mood for meditation and prayer if you go to the same spot at the same time every day. Select a room free from distracting noises, if possible. Keep your Bible and your favorite devotional books there. Also, have a pen and notebook to jot down information you wish to remember, and to record your affirmations. When you enter this room and shut the door, say, "I am not alone. God is with me in this 'secret place'". Seek God daily in a familiar place of prayer.
- Third, decide upon a definite sequence of study, meditation, and prayer.

We are all creatures of habit. If we want to climb to new levels of thought and action we should establish routine practices that will guide our thinking into worthy patterns. In our next Lesson, "PERSONAL GROWTH THROUGH PRAYER", detailed suggestions will be given for the use of this time which we set aside for study as well as for devotionals.



SEND UP FLASH PRAYERS

*I*T is true that a regular appointment with our God prepares our minds and hearts for entry into His presence. But let us remember that our Creator is listening whenever we speak to Him. So, in addition to set times for prayer, we can at any moment freely give an unpremeditated exclamation of praise, a plea for wisdom, or a cry for strength to meet the demands of the hour. In less than a minute FLASH PRAYERS can lift us out of a mood of resentment into one of charity, or out of irritation into a tranquil frame of mind! When we are fatigued, they can give us a "second wind".

When should you send up FLASH PRAYERS?

1. IN THE MOMENT WHEN YOU ARE SURPRISED BY JOY.

You discover the first crocus blooming by your door. Let your delight find expression in praise to the One who sends the Spring. For weeks you have been tortured by a nagging pain in your shoulder, and suddenly discover that it is gone. Say a word of thanksgiving to the Great Healer. You have been struggling with a difficult problem, and quite unexpectedly the solution breaks through. Let your relief prompt you to pray.

2. WHEN YOU ARE AT YOUR "WITS END".

Your child has disappeared. A moment ago he was right by your side and now he is nowhere to be seen. Don't become frantic. Pray. Ask God to tell you where to look for him, and whom you should ask to join in the search.

Your air flight is cancelled and you find yourself stranded in a strange city without financial resources. Don't panic. Pray. Your plight is not as bad as it seems. Almost at your elbow is someone who will help you out of your predicament.

The morning mail brings bad news. Before you attempt to face it, send up a FLASH PRAYER for Divine Help. This will clear your mind and steady your nerves so you will be able to cope with the situation you must face.

3. WHEN YOU ARE KEPT WAITING.

You are caught in the commuter traffic. During those minutes when your car is at a standstill, don't fret, or become impatient. PRAY. The guidance you will receive can save you valuable time after you reach your place of business.

A friend or client keeps you waiting. Why waste valuable time and energy in irritation? Use the delay for constructive prayer and planning.

opportunities for FLASH PRAYERS. They will help you not only to calmly meet emergencies and to salvage moments that otherwise would be wasted, but they will also help you to live more continuously in the Presence of God.



DIRECT YOUR LAST WAKING THOUGHTS

RECENT studies in psychology have brought forth the theory that we can make intellectual and spiritual advances even while we sleep. All of us know that there is a power in the subconscious mind that cannot be measured. And it is quite evident that this power can be used for good to promote our welfare. Therefore, it is of utmost importance that we intelligently direct our last waking thoughts. We should never allow them to slip into channels that foster misgivings, worry, and sleeplessness. Otherwise we may arise even more burdened by fatigue than when we went to bed.

Some uneasiness can be avoided by simple precautions. Before you prepare for the night, look around to see if there are details that require your attention. Be sure the door is locked and the lights out, if these might be concerns that would lead you to be restless.

Also take a brief mental checkup. If you are made restless by a thought such as "Did I tell John he has a ride in the morning?" don't carry such a question to bed with you. Clear away misgivings by immediate action. Otherwise, make a memorandum to care for the matter in the morning. Do not attempt to sleep while distracted by the fear that you may forget something for which you are responsible.

Most important of all is the need to unload any burden of guilt which would haunt you. If you have offended someone, and can now ask for pardon, do so. Whenever there has been a day in which you knew you were selfish, or unkind, or lost your temper, ask God to forgive you. Never try to gloss over your errors, for any effort to push them aside only buries them in the subconscious where they are apt to disturb your rest.

We all make errors. But it is useless to hoard them and to count them over and over. This distracts our minds and undermines our health.

Every day rectify your current mistakes, as far as you are able to do so. Lay the remainder before God each night, asking and accepting His forgiveness. In this way you will sweep your mind clean, and you will be prepared for sweet sleep.

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Earlier in this Lesson we stressed the importance of using the avenue of Prayer to lead us into God's Presence and then of taking time to enjoy being with Him. Before you seek sleep, once more hold in your mind the thought that God is very real and very near.

Muriel Lester, the famous social worker who has lived a dynamic life through the power of prayer, said that this practice helped her to relax. She would hold in her mind the thought: "With every breath I draw I am taking in something of the creative and recreating breath of God." Miss Lester advised all

who had difficulty in falling asleep to make this affirmation, and at the same time allow their breathing to become deeper and slower.

Whether you follow this technique, or some other, you will be wise not to attempt to solve major problems in the evening when your energy is low. When you are preparing for sleep avoid thoughts that require concentration. Such moments are your opportunity to confidently entrust your cares to your Heavenly Father.



CONCLUSION

P RAYER has the power to provide for us a "Rock" to which we can cling when we feel our lives are being wrecked. It can give us a chart to follow when we feel that we have lost our way. It can open our eyes to the Person to whom we should turn when we are lonely or heartsick.

Whatever has been your spiritual experience in the past, resolve that you will now seek for a more vital contact with your God. Meet Him each morning and you will find strength for your day. Observe definite periods of study and meditation, and you will steadily grow in an understanding of God's nature and of His will for your life.

Use "FLASH PRAYERS" to reorient your thinking and to help you keep in line with God's purposes. They will save you many false steps. Before retiring, sweep your mind clean by laying your anxieties and regrets before the Source of all life. Then you will enter sleep with the assurance that you are surrounded by God's love, that you are safe in His care.



AFFIRMATION

I will begin and end each day with thoughts of God.

I will turn moments of waiting into opportunities for brief contact with my Maker - for praise, thanksgiving, or petition to Him.

I will set aside a few minutes every day for spiritual study, meditation, and prayer.



Blessings,

Your Instructor.